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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000985

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SITREP#2 16:00
BAKU

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¶1. (SBU) During the late morning and afternoon, voting in Azerbaijan's presidential election continued relatively smoothly. Election monitors from the U.S. Embassy, spread throughout the country in 19 separate teams, are reporting that most polling stations are well-organized and the polling station workers seem familiar with their roles and responsibilities. Monitoring teams report turnout being close to 50% in most polling stations by early afternoon; this is higher than many pre-election observers expected. While the day has been declared a national holiday, teams report that the majority of voters have been women thus far, and the expectation is that men will vote after working hours. Polling stations are scheduled to close at 19:00; counting of ballots should begin immediately afterwards.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy teams have noted a number of small problems in some polling stations. In several cases, polling stations have not been well managed, and this has led on occasion to overcrowding and problems with checking the names and credentials of voters. There is also consistent misunderstanding of when and how voters' fingers should be inked, including problems with inking the wrong finger, forgetting to ink entirely, and forgetting to check if the finger has already been inked. Family voting has occurred in a number of instances, but usually the precinct election commissions stop this behavior. In two instances monitors have seen evidence of tampering with ballot boxes. Monitors have also heard reports of employers forcing employees to vote, including metro workers in Baku having their labor books confiscated until they voted and others asking for precinct chairman signatures on voter invitations to prove that they had voted. One monitor in Guba also reported that unidentifiable people were located outside of a polling station and checking off names on an unofficial copy of the voter list and reporting info by telephone to undisclosed parties.

¶3. (SBU) Embassy monitors have found domestic monitors in every polling station visited. On average there seem to be 8 to 10 monitors at each polling station. The overwhelming majority of these monitors are party observers affiliated with the ruling party- the Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP). Embassy monitors have found observers from the Election Monitoring Center (EMC) at their assigned polling stations, although these observers are not openly displaying their affiliation with the de-registered organization, per their instructions (ref A). There are no reports of domestic monitors experiencing problems gaining access to polling stations. Outside polling stations, Embassy monitors have witnessed representatives from all three government sponsored NGOs conducting exit polls. In some instances, Embassy

monitors witnessed all three organizations conducting exit polls at the same polling station, leading to some questionable data collection practices.

14. (SBU) The Ambassador attended an open house at EMC's Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) Data Collection Center, which is operating with assistance from the National Democratic Institute (NDI). EMC and NDI leadership informed the Ambassador that EMC's PVT is on track for completion. Results of EMC's surveys and collection efforts are being compiled; PVT numbers should be available tomorrow morning, Baku time. EMC's nationwide efforts are proceeding well. However, NDI's Washington-based PVT expert Richard Klein noted that EMC has experienced serious problems in Baku and Khachmaz. In Baku, 40% of EMC's observers, mostly university students, withdrew from participation yesterday evening. Remaining observers were rapidly re-assigned, however, to cover the most important locations for the PVT. In Khachmaz -- a small town in the north -- the problem is more acute, as the Regional Coordination and 4 of the 7 District Coordinators withdrew their participation, thus possibly jeopardizing the PVT in this region. The Swedish and Norwegian Ambassadors to Baku also visited the EMC PVT Center; other international visitors are expected. The Ambassador, with credentials, also visited four polling stations near the Embassy in Baku.

15. (SBU) The Embassy continues to be in contact with the Central Election Commission, which has been keen to learn of voting irregularities. Additionally, legal advisors at the Presidential Apparatus have contacted the Embassy to ask about

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observers' experiences. In several cases, there is evidence that the GOAJ has taken action to address problems.
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